

Reunion

by Dr. Jekyl

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Summary: Twenty years after Voyager returns to the Alpha Quadrant, two old friends meet EMH, 7 .

Reunion

Disclaimer: Voyager is Paramount's playground, though the debate is still open as to whether they deserve it or not

Notes: Written well before the end of Voyager, shortly after 'Someone to Watch Over Me' screened, so this is no longer really adhering to cannon, if, in fact it ever actually was.

> Reunion

> The station was crowded, a confusion of bustling beings of various races, runaway luggage, pets, children, people searching for boarding passes, docking bays and passports... it seemed to hover scant inches away from chaos. Periodically, the comm. unit would sound, announcing the latest arrivals and boarding calls, as well as departures and clipped passenger reminders for those ill-mannered enough to run late.<p>

She sat on a chair, a rock of calm in the seeming chaos that flowed around her, absently wondering how - hundreds of years after the invention of such crude mechanisms for transportation as the internal combustion engine - travel was still, to many, such a daunting and ill organized affair. But then, she mused, it was the end of the so-called Earth "holiday season", and many who did not normally travel much further than the end of their solar system were returning to their respective planets from vacations and family get-togethers. The noise in particular was oppressive, and she began to feel a slight tinge of claustrophobia, an irrational fear that no amount of therapy had been able to cure.

"Well, well, well," a familiar voice boomed over the din, "if it isn't my favorite Borg."

"Ex-Borg, as you know very well, Doctor," she replied with a hint of a smile and stood to face him.

At her slightly amused expression his own smile widened and, dropping his bags, he pulled her into a bear-hug. After a few seconds, he broke the contact and took a step back.

"I didn't expect you to come and meet me here. I'm not complaining, mind. It's great to see you again, in the flesh, so to speak."

"Likewise."

"It's been what, two years?"

"Actually it's closer to three. I trust you've been well?"

"More or less, more or less... I had a virus scare two weeks ago, but now I'm as fit as the metaphorical fiddle," the Doctor said and paused, looking her up and down, noting the slight creases and crinkles that, despite the best efforts of both modern medical science and the nano-probes in her bloodstream, had taken up residence on her face over the years. "You look as beautiful as ever."

"Flattery," she deadpanned, "is irrelevant."

He chuckled and bent to re-capture his bags.

"Stating the honest truth isn't flattery, Annika," he chided, still smiling, "but, if you insist I dispense with the usual platitudes, I shall. I guess some things will never change."

"Perhaps, but I take it your appearance will not be one of them," she teased back as they began to weave their way through the crowd and away from the busy shuttle terminal. The hologram's fondness for changing his appearance almost as often as most people changed their clothes was near legendary.

"Well," he admitted, "that goes without saying. But as I always say, why just change the outfit when you can change the body that goes with it? Besides, it keeps my students on their toes. For the reunion, however, I thought it might be a good idea to revert to something people will actually recognize. It's not as if I wear my emitter on my sleeve any more, handy for identificational purposes."

"Your logic is... impeccable... Doctor."

"I should hope so. Isn't it always?"

She appeared to consider that. "Most of the time," she announced after a moment.

"Most of the time? Only most of the time? Hmmpf. Next think you'll be telling me I sing flat."

"Actually...."

He sighed and treated the ceiling to his best "why me" look. "Impossible. As you well know, I am incapable of singing an 'off note.' Five minutes of you, me and a tuning fork shall soon sort out just who's flat and just who, as always, is note-perfect."

She smiled. "You lost last time."

"I very well did not," he huffed. "The tuning fork was out of tune. It was sharp. And so were you."

"I was under the impression that the reason for creating a tuning fork was to provide a device that established the correct pitch of a note. Therefore, a tuning fork by definition can't be out of tune. At any rate, I wasn't sharp. Face the facts. You were flat by all of .027 hertz."

"Impossible," he snorted, valiantly trying to mask another smile and maintain his facade of insulted irritation, "I was dead accurate and you know it."

"Perhaps... and then perhaps not. But I'm feeling generous tonight, Doctor, so I'll give you another chance to prove your accuracy. Shall we say my quarters, 1700 hours? You may bring the tuning fork."

"It's a date."

They exchanged a smile and finished the walk to the transporter pad in a companionable silence.

Night fell with a surprising suddenness, as it has a habit of doing on many a world. In the intervening hours, she had given him a tour of her new apartment and grounds before the two had settled down to catch up on news and exchange gossip, of which there was plenty, and reminisce about "old times." They'd even managed to fit in their customary "sing off" and resulting argument over who won - which finally ended in a mutually conceded draw. Eventually though, Annika announced that it was time for her to turn in for the evening. The Doctor agreed.

"That's probably a good idea - after all, we've an early start tomorrow. You know, I might actually turn in myself."

At her curious look he launched into an enthusiastic explanation of the latest addition he'd made to his program. "Sleep mode. You know, I'm absolutely amazed that I didn't think of it earlier. It allows my image to be projected while the rest of my program is essentially off-line - much like sleep in organic beings. It's better than being completely off-line, as I don't have to rely on either someone turning me back on or the emitter's timer-function, and, in addition, it saves me from becoming bored when everyone else is sleeping and I have nothing to do, or at least nothing to do that won't wake anyone. I was thinking I may actually program in some 'dream' sub-routines, to get the full experience, as it were. What do you think?"

"I think it's an interesting concept," she said with a yawn and rose from her seat, "and one well worth exploring. Just be careful. You

know what happened when you first experimented with creating dream-subroutines on your own."

"I remember. Quite vividly," he winced. "That was an experience I never want to repeat. Ever. In fact, I've tried rather hard to convince myself the whole thing never happened."

It was too good a chance to miss. "Not even if it meant you had the opportunity to play captain again?"

He raised a superior eyebrow and grinned. "You forget, I get to 'play captain' now legitimately, on occasion. Rank hath its privileges, after all."

"Not even if it meant you got to paint me nude?"

His smile vanished to be replaced by a rather open-mouthed, shocked expression. "Annika!"

"Don't worry. I never minded," she laughed. "In fact, I thought it was quite... amusing."

He glared at her. "Thank you. Thank you very much indeed."

"Don't mention it," she replied and gave him another amused look. "Good night, Doctor. Feel free to use the guest bedroom if you feel so inclined."

He sighed and shook his head. He'd created a monster. And to think she used to be accused of lacking a sense of humor.

"I might just do that. Good night yourself, Annika, and sleep well."

Some sixth sense prompted her to wake. A slight disturbance in the air, a small noise where there should have been silence... both pointed to another presence in the room.

"Computer, increase illumination by 20%."

The increase in lighting revealed one rather sheepish Doctor, lounging in the doorway.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you."

She eyed him speculatively, her expression tinged with both amusement and exasperation. "I was under the impression that you were going to bed as well, Doctor. Have you developed a predilection I was unaware of for watching people as they sleep?"

"No, not exactly. I just wanted to check up on you."

"Check up on me," she repeated.

"Something like that."

She looked at him, scrutinizing. There was something... odd... about his expression. It was at once both content and unhappy; the corners

of his mouth were turned up slightly but his eyes seemed to possess a strange, sad quality, hinting at regret and longing. She had seen him wear that expression before, and had often wondered what he was thinking about.

"Doctor?"

"Hmmm?"

She thought for a moment.

"You've been a good friend to me."

He looked at her curiously. "I've always tried to be," he replied with a slight smile, "Whether or not I succeeded at all is an entirely different matter... but I like to think I did."

She swung her feet over the edge of the bed, hands in her lap, and considered it.

"I believe you succeeded, a majority of the time." She raised her gaze from her hands to look at him again, continuing more slowly. "You're my best friend, Doctor. You've always been there for me, willing to listen to me and my problems and offer advice - even if some of it was... unsolicited." She allowed herself a slight smile when he snorted in derision at that. "You've been supportive of me from the moment I first arrived on Voyager, from our 'social lessons' to our arrival in the Alpha Quadrant, my decision not to enlist in Starfleet, my first failed romantic relationship...." She trailed off, remembering, even as she was sure he did.

It was just under four years after Voyager's return to the Alpha Quadrant, and involved a 32-year-old human astronomer by the name of Jonathan Trafalgar. It was something straight out of a romance novel, all love-at-first-sight and eyes meeting across a crowded room. True to his promise of some six years earlier, the Doctor had made himself available as confidant, dispenser-of-advice, liaison and general accomplice when she'd decided to pursue the relationship. However, and despite their best efforts, it had deteriorated and eventually came to a messy, bitter end some five months after what the Doctor loosely referred to as "first contact."

"He didn't deserve you," he remarked softly after a long, silent minute.

"So you told me."

She focused on him again, more memories of that long-past evening returning to her. A last-ditch effort to salvage the flagging romance had ended in tatters, leaving her heart-broken and crying into the Doctor's shoulder for what seemed like several hours. He'd held her gently, murmuring quiet reassurances into her ear until she calmed down to some extent, not moving even when she eventually fell into the sleep of the emotionally exhausted, safe and warm, cradled in his arms. It had been a long time ago - over sixteen years, in fact, but she could still clearly recall every detail, knew every nuance of light and play of shadow, could still smell the wine spilt on the tablecloth... feel the strange, desperate, hollow feeling in her body that left her choking for breath... the overwhelming need for some form of comfort that had sent her running into the warmth and

protection of the Doctor's arms... the strange, almost haggard expression on his face....

She wondered distantly why she hadn't seen it sooner.

"You never told me."

"It was a long time ago," he said simply.

"Not that long."

"It's been almost 24 years, Annika."

"And yet you never told me, in all of that time. I never even suspected that you had developed... feelings for me."

He sighed and left his post in the doorway to sit down on the bed beside her.

"You couldn't have known. I did my best to bury everything, hide it away from you. It's not to say that I haven't wanted to tell you... well, that's not always been exactly true," he allowed with the barest hint of a self mocking smile. "I was going to tell you on any number of occasions - when you gave me that first enhanced tricorder, the day after that, the week after that, the day Voyager returned to the Alpha Quadrant, when you and John broke up, the fifth anniversary party, the tenth anniversary party... but I always backed out at the last instant. I could never do it, Anni. Three little words, and I could never work up the courage to say them to you." He snorted in self-depreciation and shook his head. "A love-sick fool too cowardly to come forth. I imagine it's quite pathetic. Eventually, though, it got to the point where... where I just assumed either the feelings would fade over time or you'd work it out for yourself...." He trailed off, looking down at his feet. "The former never happened, despite my best efforts, might I add, and as for the latter...."

She put her arm around his shoulders, pulling him to her in an instinctive gesture. He closed his eyes with a sigh and let his head rest on her shoulder.

"Oh, Doctor," she whispered, "I'm sorry."

There was a long silence before he murmured his reply. "As far as I'm aware, you have nothing to be sorry for."

"I disagree. It's apparent that I've unknowingly caused you a lot of pain, insisting you help me pursue other romances."

"Sometimes, perhaps, but the key word there is 'unknowingly.' Unknowingly, Annika. There's no way you could have known," he repeated, straightening and turning to face her. "Besides, you never insisted - I offered. And though you may have caused me some pain, you've also given me a lot of joy, probably more than you'll ever know. It's been my privilege to be your friend, to watch you smile, make you laugh, to dance with you, sing with you, to... to watch you fall in love... I just wanted you to be happy," he sighed, his tone slightly wistful. "If anything, it's I who should be sorry."

"You also have nothing to be sorry for."

"Are you so sure?"

"For loving me, for wanting me to be happy? No."

"A nice sentiment. But think about it. I've been... deceiving you for almost a quarter of a century. I... I could have used my position as your friend on countless occasions for my own gain. I could have colored your view of potential suitors, played saboteur...."

"Did you?"

"Never consciously. Unconsciously, perhaps. I'll probably never know. But there have been times where I've been tempted, tempted almost beyond imagining...." He trailed off to continue in a much softer voice, "As I am right now."

To her surprise, he leaned forward and brushed a gentle kiss across her lips before pulling away slightly, one hand coming up to tangle in her hair. His eyes searched her face. Whatever he found there, she realized, wasn't what he was looking for.

He stood with a small, sad smile, his fingers lingering in a gentle caress of her cheek. "Sleep well, Seven of Nine, and sweet dreams."

He turned and began to walk away.

Of its own accord, her hand came up to press against her lips, a testament to the gentle, fleeting pressure she had felt there.

The Doctor paused in the doorway, hesitating as if debating his next move. Eventually he turned around again.

"I love you."

The whispered words barely had time to reach her ears before he was gone, the door closing silently behind him as if he were never there.

End
file.